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SUBJECT: MISSION RIGHTSIZING GOAL

¶1. Introduction and Summary: A recent review of the Mission Strategic Plan provided a snapshot of what we achieved in the last year and our top priorities looking ahead. This is the fifth cable to provide a goal-by-goal look at what Embassy Dushanbe is doing. For our rightsizing goal all agencies and offices coordinate through the ICASS Budget Committee to provide the management platform to support Mission staff carrying out the work to achieve U.S. goals, to manage U.S. government-funded projects and to oversee prudent use of taxpayer funds. End introduction and summary.

Accomplishments

¶2. The Mission has high levels of local staff turnover, as static local salaries cannot compete with other opportunities available to skilled English-speaking staff. The Mission successfully argued for an off-cycle salary review which resulted in a 12.5% across the board increase, the first for some years, in local staff compensation. The HR office prepared information to allow a multiagency group to review our local leave plan and is working with HR/OE bring it into compliance with local labor law.

¶3. The winter of 2007/2008 was extremely difficult, with bitter cold temperatures that cut off power and water supplies for weeks at a time. The Mission had to supply generator fuel and water to all Embassy housing during these weeks, and the Department contemplated drawing down Mission staff. Heroic efforts by the team kept the embassy functioning and the staff in country. For winter 2008/2009 the Mission undertook a thorough winter planning effort. With OBO support, we obtained extra temporary fuel storage for diesel, so that we could keep generators and delivery trucks running in case of fuel shortages. Although a warmer winter meant the severest hardships did not come to pass, by mid-February post was managing lengthy power outages each day.

¶4. Working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs we gathered information on the government's recently implemented VAT refund process, submitted our first VAT refund request and got our first refund. We installed water meters and got a written agreement with the water company, validated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ensure that bills to the Embassy for water reflect actual water use versus the previous method of estimated usage based on the size of the intake pipes. This resulted in significant cost savings. Construction was started on recreation facilities next to the Chancery building.

¶5. The Mission has grown 250% in physical size and 500% in direct hire staff in the last five years, but growth in the ICASS staff has not kept pace. Post made a major push to get three new positions, an HR/FM officer, an S/GSO and another IM officer. Until these positions are created and filled, the Ambassador has implemented a moratorium on new NSDD-38 positions at the Mission. We got one of these positions and the new HR/FM will arrive in March 2009. Post is short of ICASS local staff

and has been filling what are essentially full-time slots via a labor contract. Post has gotten ICASS Council approval to create direct hire positions to regularize this situation, and has a plan to implement that change by the end of the fiscal year.

Priorities for the Coming Year

¶6. The electrical wiring in a large portion of our housing pool does not meet U.S. safety standards. In the recent months we have had two serious electrical fires in post housing. This problem was a major issue noted by the OIG in our last inspection. As people turn over, Facilities Maintenance has been upgrading the wiring of homes during make-readies. This is a major job in each house and takes eight-twelve weeks, often delaying our ability to have arriving staff move directly into permanent quarters. There is only one contractor able to do this work to the needed standard, and this contractor cannot handle multiple houses simultaneously. This summer we will turn over or add twenty houses, which can not all be upgraded in the short window available. Establishing a plan to upgrade the electrical wiring of houses is a top priority in the coming year.

¶7. Post is experiencing high and increasing turnover of skilled local staff. We lost more than 25 people in 2008 and about 20 current FSNs have indicated plans to leave this year. Under our local compensation plan, the highest paid FSN makes less than \$20,000 per year, with most of our key staff getting \$14-16,000. Skilled staff with good English can make much more in Russia or elsewhere. Further the deteriorating living conditions in the country, including long months with limited power, the deteriorating quality of schooling for children, and the lack of healthcare are strong incentives for people to leave. The pool of applicants to refill these jobs is getting smaller and

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applicants have less experience and fewer skills. Getting a further increase in local compensation will be important to improving the stability of our local staff. In addition, we put a high priority getting post specific ICASS training in Dushanbe in FY 2010, in part because of high staff turnover.

¶8. Post hopes to make further progress on bringing on direct hire management staff up to the level needed to support our operations and assistance programs. Getting a senior GSO and an additional IM position remain top priorities. Once we have stopped using contract labor for core positions and we will present a plan to bring our Facilities Maintenance local staff into line with the amount of property post maintains. OBO is helping by providing analysis of the standard staffing needed to maintain and manage a compound and housing pool of our size. Post will use this to create a plan for bringing the number of staff in Facilities Maintenance up to the number needed to properly manage post facilities.

¶9. Finally, post will be working OBO both to reconfigure our existing space to meet our needs, and to move our warehouse and motorpool from a condemned Soviet kindergarten several miles away from the NEC onto the compound.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

¶10. Besides managing the ongoing turnover of local staff, in the summer of 2009 we will face an unusually large turnover of American staff, including virtually all of the management section, except for one IM officer. As mentioned, the large turnover coinciding with staffing gaps means that housing make readies will be a challenge and the needed electrical upgrades will need to be phased over time

¶11. GSO faces additional constraints trying to manage motorpool and warehouse operations at a separate site. Post faces exceptional logistical and transport difficulties, few local sources for most supplies, and a lack of qualified local contractors for many services and tasks. There are limited international flights into and out of Dushanbe, often on smaller

planes with limited cargo space. Rail cargo often faces long delays in transiting neighboring Uzbekistan, requiring a long lead time for anything ordered. Likewise, pouch service faces many serious delays.

¶12. In facing these challenges we are getting good support from OBO and look forward to the team coming to chart a path forward. In dealing with local utilities the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Diplomatic Services Office has been constructive. NEA/SCA/EX has returned recoveries fund to us. This has been key to managing our budget, and we look forward to continue support in this area. NEA/SCA/EX has also helped in providing WAE coverage during summer gaps in the management team, which has also been important for us to meet our goals.
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